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AFFGHAN PAPERS.

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SPEECH

OF

ALEXANDER MURRAY DUNLOP, ESQ., M.P.,

ON MOVING FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A SELECT COMMITTEE,

“To consider the ‘Correspondence relating to Affghanistan,’ as presented to this House in 1839, and the same Correspondence as presented in 1858, and printed by special order of the House in 1859, and to report on the discrepancies between the two; and also to inquire into the circumstances of the preparation of that Correspondence for being presented on the former of these occasions; and to report their opinion whether any, and, if any, what, precautions should be taken to secure that Documents presented to this House by the Government as Copies or Extracts of Correspondence or other Papers shall give a true representation of the contents of such Correspondence or Papers.”

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON TUESDAY, MARCH 19TH, 1861.

EXTRACTED FROM
HANSARD'S PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

Vol. clxii. p. 37.

1861.

v. p. 1662

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AFFGHAN PAPERS.

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

Tuesday, March 19, 1861.

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS (AFFGHANISTAN,
&c.)—THE AFFGHAN WAR.

SELECT COMMITTEE MOVED FOR.

MR. DUNLOP, in rising pursuant to notice, to move for a Select Committee to consider the Correspondence relating to Affghanistan, as presented to the House in 1839, and the same Correspondence as presented in 1858, and printed by special order of the House in 1859, said, that it was his painful duty to call the attention of the House to one of the grossest cases of falsification of public documents by which that House had ever been attempted to be deceived. He knew it would be said that this occurred a long time ago, and that all interest in the matter was now gone. It was quite true that the papers to which his Motion referred were laid upon the table of the House so long ago as the year 1839; but it was not the fault of those who sought to have the matter inquired into that an inquiry had not taken place long since. These papers as then published were sent out to India before the unhappy death of Sir Alexander Burnes; and Sir Alexander feeling deeply the injustice done to himself by the mutilation of his despatches, sent home to this country true copies of the despatches. These getting abroad became known, and created an impression that an unfair use had been made of the papers in laying them on the table of the House. In 1842 a Motion was made by the hon. Gentleman the Member for Inverness (Mr. Baillie) seconded by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Buckinghamshire for a further production, but it was lost,—the minority numbering only nine. The following year another Motion was made by the hon. Member for Sheffield (Mr. Roebuck) to the same effect, and seconded by Mr. Hume; but that Motion also was rejected by a large majority. He did not wonder that these Motions were rejected, for Lord Broughton, who had been the President of the Board of Control when the papers were produced, and who was then a Member of this House, gave an assurance that the documents had not been garbled; and his

successor in office under the succeeding Government (Lord FitzGerald) repeated that assurance in the other House of Parliament. The people of this country are accustomed to place the utmost confidence in the personal honour and word of the Ministers of the Crown, and it was no wonder, therefore, that this House accepted these assurances and rejected those Motions. But in 1851 *The History of the War in Affghanistan* was published by Mr. Kaye, which established beyond all doubt that there must of necessity have been a great mutilation of these documents. Mr. Kaye, in his summing up of the character of Sir Alexander Burnes, said—

“It is right, too, that it should never be forgotten by those who wish to form a correct estimate of the character and career of Sir Alexander Burnes, that both have been misrepresented in those collections of State papers, which are supposed to furnish the best materials of history, but which are often in reality only one-sided compilations of garbled documents—counterfeits which the ministerial stamp forces into currency, defrauding a present generation, and handing down to posterity a chain of dangerous lies.”

The demand for the papers was renewed in 1858, and a Motion for the production of them by the hon. Member for Sheffield (Mr. Hadfield) was carried. There was still a struggle to prevent the printing of them, and it was not until 1859 that these documents were printed in this blue book. It happened that they were prepared under the superintendence of Mr. Kaye, who was now at the India Office, and he did it with the utmost care and diligence, marking everywhere by brackets those passages which in the papers laid upon the table of the House in 1839 had been omitted. He (Mr. Dunlop) had read this blue book with amazement, indignation, and shame. Amazement, at the extent and audacity of the falsifications; indignation, at the injustice done to poor Sir Alexander Burnes and Dost Mahommed, and at the fraud that had been perpetrated on the House; and shame, that a Department of the Government could be found capable of resorting to such means of screening itself from censure. There had been no undue delay, and he hoped that the interest in this matter was not altogether gone. The terrible events of the Affghan campaign—the disgrace to our arms—the annihilation of our army—the

horrors endured by the captives during their captivity, and the agonies of their friends at home—had burnt, as with brand of iron, into the memory of the people of this country, the fearful story of that war, and all the more indestructibly from the solemn conviction that all these fatal calamities were, in the words of Mr. Kaye, its historian, to be traced “to the curse of God resting heavily upon an unholy cause.” He agreed with Mr. Kaye, and he agreed with Sir Herbert Edwardes, who had recently said that this was an “unhallowed, unrighteous, and causeless war.” Here, however, he raised no question as to the policy of the Affghan war, and he would not enter on it further than was necessary for understanding the object and character of the mutilations. For that purpose he must explain what was the defence of the Indian Government for going into this war. At that time there was a great alarm, something like that which had recently been felt in this country as to an invasion by France, but, as he thought, rather better founded—a fear of an invasion of India by Russia. Russia had no doubt made great advances towards attaining influence in Central Asia. She had entered into an alliance with the Shah of Persia, and was sending agents to the different smaller courts of surrounding tribes. A natural feeling arose that the influence and power of Russia in that part of the world must be checked; and this was given as the great reason for the war which was then undertaken. Dost Mahommed Khan, who then reigned in Cabul, was one of several brothers, the rulers of Affghanistan, who were said to be in correspondence with the agents of Russia at Teheran, and who, it was contended, ought to be removed and a friendly sovereign put in their place. Lord Auckland sets forth this view in a despatch from Simla, dated 14th August, 1838, which contains the following passage:—

“Of the justice of the course about to be pursued there cannot exist a reasonable doubt. We owe it to our own safety to assist the lawful sovereign of Afghanistan in the recovery of his throne. The welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should, in the present crisis of affairs, have a decidedly friendly power on our frontier, and that we should have an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquillity, in place of a chief seeking to identify himself with those whose schemes of aggrandisement and conquest are not to be disguised.”

The “lawful sovereign” here referred to was Shah Soojah, who ten or eleven years

before had been deposed by his own subjects, and had since been living as a pensioner on the Indian Government.

In like manner, in the celebrated Simla Declaration, in which the project of the Government was announced, its justification is thus summed up—

“It was now evident that no further interference could be exercised by the British Government to bring about a good understanding between the Sikh ruler and Dost Mahommed Khan, and the hostile policy of the latter chief, showed too plainly that so long as Caubul remained under his Government, we could never hope that the tranquillity of our neighbourhood would be secured, or that the interests of our Indian Empire would be preserved inviolate.”

This then was the ground on which the war was undertaken; that Dost Mahommed Khan was so inveterately hostile to the British Government that it was absolutely necessary to depose him and place Shah Soojah in his place. But long before the disasters of the campaign occurred this policy of the Indian Government had been questioned, not only in India, but by persons high in authority at home. The restoration by foreign bayonets of a sovereign who had been driven from his country by his own subjects ten years before did not seem a very good means of establishing the independence of the country, or of strengthening our position on the frontier. It moreover involved military operations on the part of the Indian Government at a great distance from their resources, and beyond the territory of an intervening sovereign, friendly, no doubt, to the British, but capricious, and not very confidently to be relied on, and which might, therefore, end in disaster. Thus, whether viewed from a political or a military point of view, and apart from the question of justice, the policy of the Government had been much questioned. It was, therefore, important to them to present a good case to Parliament, and if they had taken care to place it before Parliament with truth, there would have been no objection to their making out a case as good as possible. The object they had in view was to prove that Dost Mahommed Khan was the inveterate enemy of this country, and that it was necessary for our own safety to depose him and to put some one in his stead who could be depended upon. And it was also desirable to confirm the decision of the Indian Government, by showing that it was in entire accordance with the opinion of Sir Alexander Burnes, whose opportuni-

ties of forming a correct judgment, as well as his acknowledged capacity, attached to his opinion great and deserved weight. Now, certainly, the papers which were laid on the table of the House in 1839, in the shape in which they appeared, substantially made out this case. At all events, they threw great doubt and suspicion on Dost Mahommed Khan, and a case was exhibited representing him as our inveterate foe. And looking to the papers as they were laid on the table in 1839, there could have been no doubt that that was the opinion of Sir Alexander Burnes. Now, he (Mr. Dunlop) thought he should shortly satisfy the House that not only were the papers defective in not giving the full truth, but that they presented to the House the very opposite of the truth, and that, systematically and regularly, facts were concealed, and whole paragraphs omitted, and others garbled, so as to give the opposite view to that which the papers really presented. He (Mr. Dunlop) now asked for a Committee that these charges might be thoroughly looked into, and that they might have a report made to them upon the subject.

In justifying his motion he must trouble the House with some quotations but he would make them as short as possible. The first despatch to which he would call the attention of the House was one of no great importance in itself, but still very important, as showing the systematic manner in which everything that could exhibit in a favourable light Dost Mahommed's conduct was steadily expunged from the papers. The despatch was from Sir Alexander Burnes, and dated 31st October, 1837, shortly after he reached Cabul. At that time one of Dost Mahommed's brothers at Candahar was about to send his son to Teheran with presents to the Shah of Persia and the Russian Ambassador at Teheran. Sir Alexander Burnes thought it desirable, if possible, to endeavour to stop the progress of this movement towards an alliance between the Sirdars of Candahar and the Court of Persia, and accordingly he had an interview with Dost Mahommed to urge on him the propriety of taking some steps to endeavour to prevent it. He gives a long account of his interview with Dost Mahommed, and the despatch, as produced, ended with a sentence in which Sir Alexander Burnes assured Dost Mahommed that if he succeeded in preventing this mission of the son of his brother "it could not

fail to be received as a strong mark of his desire for our friendship." According to the papers as laid on the table in 1839, no response was made by Dost Mahommed to this. Nor is any mention afterwards made of his having done anything in the direction wished; so that, to all appearance, on the face of the papers, an urgent appeal to the Dost by Sir Alexander to give this proof of his friendly inclinations was entirely disregarded. But the actual despatch went on, as part of the same paragraph, to say that Dost Mahommed dictated in the presence of the writer (Sir Alexander Burnes), three letters to his brothers in Candahar, urging them not to take the steps proposed. That sentence was suppressed and the letters, of which copies were transmitted, were also kept back. All the letters urged on his brothers not to make any alliance with Persia, as being offensive to England. One of these was a private letter, and, written to his own brother, it cannot be doubted that it expressed the Dost's real sentiments and wishes. It contains these passages—

"Oh! my brother, if you will do such things without my concurrence, what will the people of the world say to it? We have an enemy like Runjeet Singh in our neighbourhood, and the English may get the affair of Peshawar settled. How, then, can we enter on an alliance with others, if they exhibit to us friendship? I see nothing for the Mussulmans, in their wars against the Sikhs, but to be friendly with the English Government, and endeavour to please them. If you will do contrary to what I do, it will be very bad, and finally create such animosity between us, if you go by one road and I by the other, that it must injure the welfare of both."

"If you will not abandon the intention of sending your son to Persia, you must consider me your enemy."

Well, that letter was suppressed—as also a paragraph in Sir Alexander Burnes's own despatch, in which he stated his confidence in the success of his mission in these terms—

"Arriving at a time when Persian and Russian intrigues were insinuating themselves into this country, a chain of circumstances fortuitous in their nature, and which at first foreboded distraction, has happily defeated for the present their designs in Cabool; and, with the friendly footing in this important capital which have been given to us by Ameer Dost Mahomed Khan, I found a strong hope that the Candahar Chiefs will also be turned from their purpose, and ultimately contribute to the ascendancy of British counsels over that of every other power between India and Persia."

Another paper, which had been similarly dealt with, was dated 15th November,

1837. It was a despatch of five paragraphs, but as published in 1839 it was reduced to three. And here he might observe that in all the public despatches of Sir Alexander Burnes, in the originals, the paragraphs were numbered with ordinary numerals. In the copies as printed these numerals were left out, and though paragraphs were omitted from the middle of a despatch, there were no marks left by which to show that omissions had been made. In other despatches, again, there was sometimes a reference to specific paragraphs of those of a previous date by their numbers, but these references were in the print always carefully expunged. By these means all traces of omissions and a want of actual connuity were destroyed. In his despatch of the 15th November, Sir Alexander Burnes sent to the Governor General the copy of a letter from the Russian Ambassador at Teheran to Dost Mahommed. The three paragraphs of the despatch as printed in 1839 simply recite that Sir Alexander Burnes had got the letter and forwarded it, and point to the confirmation thereby given to Sir John McMill's views as to the intrigues of Russia. No mention is, however, made of the way in which the copy came into Sir Alexander's hands, and it is left to be supposed that it was obtained in the usual way in which such matters are accomplished. The third paragraph of the actual despatch, however, which is expunged without any marks to indicate that a part was omitted, states how it really came into his possession as follows :—

“Before my arrival in Cabool I had heard, through Mr. Masson, of the communication now forwarded ; but some doubts had occurred as to its authenticity, from its wanting a signature, which can no longer be entertained. In the course of an interview with Mirza Samée Khan, a few days ago, the conversation turned on Russian designs, and I at once asked him as to the communication which the Ameer had received from Russia, when he offered to show it to me, and sent it accordingly.”

Here, then, was the confidential secretary and minister of Dost Mahommed, who was represented as irretrievably hostile to us and friendly to Russia, giving to Sir Alexander Burnes, the agent of the British Government, the letter of the Russian Ambassador at Teheran. Yet this paragraph was omitted, and the fact was concealed. And, moreover, the following paragraph, giving Sir Alexander's own impressions, was also expunged from the despatch—

“I am glad to say that no answer has as yet been returned to Count Simonitch's letter, and I have every reason to believe that none will ever be sent, but in the now very improbable event of this chief's despairing of the sympathy and friendly feelings of the British Government.”

Another instance of the systematic suppression of every fact which could show a friendly disposition on the part of Dost Mahommed occurs in regard to a despatch of the 19th November. There had come from Cabul a copy of a proposed treaty of alliance between the Sirdars of Candahar and the Persian Government. This was reported by Sir Alexander Burnes, who wrote—“I have seen the original paper, which arrived here a few days ago, so that there is no doubt of its authenticity.” Such was the sentence as published ; but there was struck out of the middle of it these few but important words—“and was sent to me by the Ameer.” The Ameer afterwards went to Sir Alexander, and had a conversation with him on this subject, and Sir Alexander, in his despatch, said—

“His motive for having sought this private interview was to assure me that he was entirely English in his views, interests, and opinions, and that his position, services, and power were at our disposal to check these inroads ; but it was very advisable in such a state of things to act betimes.”

This statement, however, was expunged. It might be said that all this conduct on the part of the Dost was fallacious, and intended to deceive Sir Alexander Burnes into a false belief of his friendly leanings towards the British. He (Mr. Dunlop) did not think so. At all events, let the facts appear. If the House of Commons was to judge of the conduct of the Indian Government and of the Board of Control, it was entitled to have all the facts before it ; but it was quite out of the question to suppose that they could form a correct judgment as to whether the Indian Government were warranted in seeking to dethrone Dost Mahommed, when every circumstance in his favour was strictly excluded from their knowledge. He now came to the very remarkable circumstance of the appearance of a Russian agent at Cabul. Here he wished to say, in the first instance, that there were a great number of alterations connected mainly with Russia which he did not intend to bring before the House, as he wished to confine himself to those mutilations which bore upon the judgment which the House had been called on to pronounce on the Indian policy of the invasion of Aff-

ghanistan, in justification of which the reception by Dost Mahommed of a Russian agent was very greatly relied on. This agent, Captain Vicovich, brought to the Dost a letter from the Emperor of Russia himself. Sir Alexander Burnes saw the original, and sent a *facsimile* of it to our Government. The noble Lord the Prime Minister, who was then Foreign Secretary, demanded an explanation from Russia. From the Russian Government he obtained a disavowal; and that disavowal was published in another set of papers in the same year. Having thus in one batch of papers published a disavowal of Vicovich by the Russian Government, it would certainly have been an awkward circumstance for it, if there had appeared at the same time in another batch, proof that the Emperor of Russia had written a letter by him to Dost Mahommed. He (Mr. Dunlop) did not wonder that there should have been a desire not to expose the Emperor personally to the discredit which would have attached to him by his being shown to be personally implicated in such a proceeding, though he had himself little sympathy with such a desire. If the Government of a great country descended to such low and scandalous acts as to deny the agents they had employed, it was right they should be exposed to shame. And, as a matter of policy, he thought that the encouragement given by the appearance of weakness, and of the dread of giving offence in altering despatches to prevent these things coming out, tended more to expose us to aggression than any irritation arising from the honest production of papers. A different course was taken, however; and in all the letters of Sir Alexander Burnes as to this matter, everything showing the Emperor's personal share was omitted, the terms "Russia" or "Russian Government" being always substituted for "The Emperor of Russia," and the letter itself being suppressed. He (Mr. Dunlop) could not approve of this. Still he was not one who drew the inferences from these alterations in regard to Russia, which some had done with reference to the noble Lord (Viscount Palmerston). He disclaimed those inferences and they had no bearing upon the question,—whether when the House was called upon to decide in approving or disapproving the policy of the Indian Government in going into the Affghan war, the materials for forming a judgment were fairly and honestly laid before them. Now when Cap-

tain Vicovich arrived at Candahar, Sir Alexander Burnes wrote a letter of six paragraphs, which in the papers of 1839 were reduced to two, merely announcing the arrival of a Russian agent. Everything was left unexplained. It left all the suspicions that might attach to the Dost's receiving such a messenger free course. But the despatch itself contained explanations which, instead of throwing doubts upon the fidelity of the Dost, were quite conclusive against such doubts. The despatch, after the first two paragraphs, which constitute the whole of it as printed in 1839, goes on as follows:—

"On the morning of the 19th, that is yesterday, the Ameer came over from the Bala Hissar early in the morning with a letter from his son, the Governor of Ghuzni, reporting that the Russian agent had arrived at that city on his way to Cabool. Dost Mahomed Khan said that he had come for my counsel on the occasion; that he wished to have nothing to do with any other power than the British; that he did not wish to receive any agent of any power whatever, so long as he had a hope of sympathy from us; and that he would order the Russian agent to be turned out, detained on the road, or act in the way I desired him.

"I asked the Ameer if he knew on what business the agent had come, and if he were really an agent from Russia; he replied, that I had read all his letters from Candahar, and that he knew nothing more. I replied, that it was a sacred rule among civilised nations not to refuse to receive emissaries in time of peace, and that I could not take upon myself to advise him to refuse any one who declared himself duly accredited, but that the Ameer had it in his power to show his feelings on the occasion by making a full disclosure to the British Government of the errand on which the individual had come; to which he most readily assented.

"After this the Ameer despatched a servant on the road to Ghuzni, to prevent the agent's entering Cabool without notice; but so rapid had been his journey, that he met him a few miles from the city, which he entered in the afternoon, attended by two of the Ameer's people. He has not yet seen the Ameer; he has sent a letter from Count Simonitch, which I have seen, and states that he is the bearer of letters from Mahomed Shah and the Emperor of Russia."

Now, here was the alleged tool of Russia putting himself in the hands of the British agent to act as he should advise,—ready to encounter any risk in the way of offending Russia by affronting and sending back the Emperor's agent,—and ready to venture to do what Sir Alexander Burnes did not dare to venture to advise, and offering, what he afterwards fulfilled, to communicate all that passed between him and the Russian agent to the agent of Britain. Then this reception, by the Dost, of a Russian agent, and his refusal subsequently, after the British Government had abandoned him, to dismiss him, were the

main grounds alleged for the necessity of going to war to depose him. Yet every syllable of this account was withheld from the knowledge of Parliament and of the country, which had to judge whether the war was just or not. Next he came to the very remarkable confidential despatch of the 23rd of December, 1838, addressed by Sir Alexander Burnes to the Governor General of India. In this despatch which, in the crisis created by the arrival of a Russian agent at Cabul, Sir Alexander Burnes addressed directly and confidentially to the Governor General himself, he described the state and circumstances of Cabul, with a view to advise the Governor General as to the policy to be adopted; he explained the position of the Ameer; the dangers from Persia and the Sikhs, and the quarters to which he could look for support. Three paragraphs as to these matters he would give to the House—

“The unhappy differences which have so long reigned in this country have, as your Lordship is aware, been greatly aggravated by the measures pursued by the ruler of Lahore. The chiefs of Afghanistan have for years past avowed their anxious desire to connect themselves with the British Government in India, as well from the exalted notions entertained of it as from the belief of its ability to assist them, but the British Government has stood aloof or sent cold and distant replies to their solicitations. The ex-King at Loodiana, after a lapse of years, partly equipped himself in 1833 in our territories, and, crossing the Indus, marched to Candahar, where he was defeated. The chiefs of Afghanistan universally believed that the British Government had encouraged the ex-King, and were satisfied that we should have hastened to acknowledge him had he been successful. An open avowal of our anxiety for his success could not have been productive of worse consequences than the course which was actually taken, yet it did not alienate the chiefs from us. They had driven Shooja ool Moolk from Candahar, but in their absence Runjeet Singh seized on Peshawur, and gave rise to new anxieties. Seeing that they had no hopes from us, the Afghan chiefs turned their attention to other quarters, and we have thus quickened the designs of the powers to the westward. But such was still the friendly disposition of these chiefs, that though they had written in every direction, they availed themselves of your Lordship's arrival in India to address a new Governor General, and I have no hesitation in saying that the result of that address has been productive of benefit to the State, and stayed for a while many evils.

“When it formerly occurred to Dost Mahomed Khan that he must sue for aid elsewhere, he addressed severally the Emperor of Russia, the Kings of Persia and Bokhara, and to one and all his letters were of the same tenor; that he had a powerful enemy to cope with in Runjeet Singh, who threatened his very existence; that he had applied to the all-powerful Government of the British, who were rulers of India, but had applied in vain; that the British had, as he believed, be-

friend Shooja ool Moolk in attacking him, and were the well-wishers of Runjeet Singh to his prejudice; that he had abundance of men, but no money to pay them, and he therefore implored the Mahomedan rulers to aid him, as was their duty in a holy cause, and the Emperor of Russia he courted, as will be seen in his letter, because of his power as a monarch and his influence in Persia, to which the ruler of Cabool now professed his willingness to ally himself. The result of this application has been the transmission of expensive presents by the Emperor, with a letter in reply more than gracious, ostensibly written to encourage commerce, though there be not a word on that subject in the Ameer's communication, and this letter is sent by Captain P. Vickovitch, who is charged with messages direct from the Emperor, and who is, by Count Simonitch's letter, authorised to act and communicate as if he had been his Excellency himself. The whole of these important documents are, however, before your Lordship, and as they involve matters of the first moment, I have thought it right to transmit, besides translations, copies of the correspondence in Persian, as well as a facsimile of the Emperor's, which I have not the means of translating from the Russian language. This dazzling specimen of calligraphy, together with the very friendly expressions contained in it, coming from one who enumerates so many of his lofty titles as his Imperial Majesty, has excited a stirring sensation, nor do I conceal that I have looked on with mingled feelings of astonishment and regret.

“The indication of friendship, which has been put forth by your Lordship's administration, has arrested for a time the despair which had taken possession of the Afghan nation. The language which Dost Mahomed Khan and every Mahomedan has held since a British mission entered this country is, that they would stand by us to the last, and seek no aid or connexion while there was a hope of friendship from a nation dear to them for the strict maintenance of its treaties, and celebrated, above all others, for its liberality, justice, and honour. With these words in his mouth, Dost Mahomed Khan came to inform me of the arrival of the Russian agent, of his determination to be guided by my advice, and even refuse to receive him, if it were disagreeable to me. I saw that I dare not seek to hinder an independent chief from receiving an agent, for as it is justly held to be a law in civilized countries never to attack a nation in one of this, its most sacred rights, I should have incurred a responsibility, and I am sure never been honoured by your Lordship's approbation. Though the messenger has been received and delivered his letters, I trust that the friendly devotion of Dost Mahomed Khan in asking my advice, and next handing to me all the letters brought by the emissary will remain in your Lordship's mind, as proofs of sincerity and conciliation, highly to be appreciated, and the more so as the British have as yet made no avowal of their support to his power, while he has received declarations from others, the sincerity of which can be no longer questioned.”

He proceeded to say that Dost Mahomed had informed him of what passed at the interview between him and Captain Vickovich, acquainting the Governor General that the Russian agent had offered assistance in money and otherwise, and had even

promised the payment of an annual sum as long as Dost Mahommed continued to show friendship to Russia. Sir Alexander Burnes next went on to say, that in his (Sir Alexander Burnes's) opinion, after such strong demonstrations of Russia having interested herself in Affghan affairs it was his deliberate conviction "that much more vigorous proceedings than the Government might wish or contemplate are necessary to counteract Russian and Persian intrigue in other quarters than have been hitherto exhibited." These vigorous measures he proceeds immediately to explain were to use every influence with Runjeet Singh to obtain a reasonable settlement of the affair of Peshawur, and thereby permanently secure the attachment of Dost Mahommed to the British nation. He then argues on the propriety of such an arrangement with reference to Runjeet Singh's own interests, and again reverts to the necessity of immediate action in these words—

"There being therefore facts before us in the transactions passing at Cabool, it seems impossible, with any regard to our safety, to look on longer in silence. If Russia does not entertain inimical feelings directly to the British in India, she avows that she wishes for the good offices of the chiefs on our frontier, and promises them her own in return, so that it is useless to conceal from ourselves that evils must flow from such connexions. It is indeed casting before us a challenge. It is a trite maxim, that prevention is better than cure, and we now have both in our hands; we might certainly wish to delay a while longer before acting, but it is now in our power, by the extended immediate exercise of our already established influence, to counteract every design injurious to us."

Once more again, he reiterates the specific measures which he had recommended, and concludes his despatch thus—

"Should the conduct of Dost Mahomed Khan in his frank divulgement of all that has passed meet with your Lordship's approbation, it seems a suitable preliminary step, if your Lordship resolves on making any change in our view, to set out by addressing a letter of thanks to this chief for the proofs which he has rendered of his friendship and fidelity.

"I trust that the free expression of my sentiments will not prove displeasing to your Lordship. I am emboldened by the confidence which has placed me here to speak according to my conviction."

The despatch, in short, was an earnest pleading on behalf of Dost Mahomed, giving grounds for the assurance of his fidelity and trustworthiness. Now here he (Mr. Dunlop) must do justice to the hand which had prepared this document for the House. He must have been a man of genius, whoever he was. An ordinary man would have given up this despatch as hopeless for any

use to be made of it, and proper only to be suppressed; but with a masterly boldness of falsehood which excited wonder even more than indignation, he had by his manipulation of it turned it to the very opposite purpose to that which the writer intended. The course he took was this:—He in the first place retained the short concluding sentence to keep up the character of the letter being a free and full confidential outpouring of Sir Alexander's convictions. Then he preserves all the startling sentences regarding the appearance of the Russian agent, his interview with the Dost, his alluring offers; the danger to be apprehended from Russian and Persian intrigues, and the necessity for vigorous and immediate action; but all the other paragraphs have been suppressed, and not a word remains to explain what really were the vigorous measures recommended by Sir Alexander Burnes, or his earnest pleading on behalf of Dost Mahommed and the grounds of it; so that, placed as it was in the midst of documents all leading in one direction, it could not be read among the papers of 1839, except as an incitement to the war which followed; and thus this long, argumentative, fervent pleading by Sir Alexander Burnes on behalf of Dost Mahommed, and of the policy of making a friend of him, was actually perverted into an alarmed, short, urgent appeal to the Governor General to lose no time in rising up to crush him. Next came a letter from Sir William Macnaghten, in answer to this appeal made by Sir Alexander Burnes on behalf of Dost Mahomed. It was a long document, but the blue book of 1839 reduced it to three paragraphs, pointing out the necessity of calling upon the Dost to dismiss the Russian agent, and at the same time holding out some vague promise of good offices to be rendered after the departure of Vicovich. All the rest of the letter of Sir William Macnaghten, disapproving entirely of the course which had been adopted by Sir Alexander Burnes, and condemning the expectation of pecuniary aid which he had held out to the Candahar brothers if they should break off from Persia, was suppressed. From the letter as then published no suspicion could have arisen that there had been any difference between the policy advised by Sir Alexander Burnes and that determined to be adopted by the Governor General. Everything which tended to show this difference of opinion had been studiously suppressed.

In the debate in 1842 the noble Lord, the present Foreign Secretary, had appealed to the circumstance of the opinions and arguments of Sir William Macnaghten in this letter having been withheld as a proof of the impartiality with which the alterations in the despatches had been made. He believed, however, that the India Board had deceived not only the Parliament, but the noble Lord himself, for it was impossible to read the despatch without seeing that the object of the mutilation was to conceal the fact that Sir Alexander Burnes had advocated a policy the opposite to that which the Governor General adopted. Along with Sir William's letter came one for the Dost from the Governor General to be delivered when Sir Alexander thought most suitable. Sir Alexander had recommended a letter of thanks to the Dost for his proofs of "friendship and fidelity." The one sent contained a peremptory demand that the Dost should dismiss the Russian agent; if not, Sir Alexander Burnes would be recalled. The receipt of this despatch overwhelmed Sir Alexander Burnes and crushed his hopes of success. He had confidently expected that by securing the friendship of the Dost, so entirely as he thought within our reach, he would place the interests of Britain in Central Asia on a firm basis, and defeat the intrigues of Russia; and he had confidently appealed to the Dost's proposals about Peshawur as indisputable proofs that there was no ground for the fear entertained by the advisers of the Governor General that he was likely to entertain "extravagant pretensions." This overthrow of his policy, and annihilation of his hopes sadly disheartened him. Still, with that gallantry which belonged to him, he endeavoured to do his duty as an agent, pressing on the Dost the views of his Government, and placing them before him in the strongest light. He had an interview with the Dost, and gave an account of it in the despatch to which I have now to call the attention of the House, and which is dated January 26, 1838. Of all the falsifications perpetrated, this, as regards Sir Alexander Burnes, was the most cruel, as it falsely represents him as himself expressing views directly opposite to those which he really held. The despatch as written commences thus—

"I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letters of the 25th of November and 2d of December last, which reached me about the same time, and conveyed the views of the Right Honourable the Governor General regarding the over-

tures made by Dost Mahomed Khan for adjusting his differences with the Sikhs, and the apprehension that the Maharaja would not be disposed to surrender Peshawur on those terms, but be more likely to restore it to Sooltan Mohomed Khan, its former governor."

And it goes on to say that he lost no time in making known to him the circumstances "as well as the sentiments of his Lordship on them." As printed, however, no notice is taken of the letters acknowledged to be received, but the despatch is made to begin with the word "regarding" in the middle of the sentence, while the words as to his making known to the Dost the Governor General's sentiments are struck out. In this way and by other alterations, the remarks and arguments used by Sir Alexander in his interview with the Dost have the character given to them of being his own views, instead of being merely, as they were, those of the Governor General urged on the Dost in the most effective form. Then, after detailing all the arguments used by him and Dost Mahomed's replies, Sir Alexander goes on to lay his own opinion on the Dost's views before the Indian Government; he says—

"I have thus placed before the Right Honourable the Governor General the opinions and views entertained by the ruler of Cabool, and the nature of the arguments which I have opposed them. It has appeared to me that they call for much deliberation. It will be seen that this chief is not bent on possessing Peshawur, or in gratifying an enmity towards his brothers, but simply pursuing the worldly maxim of securing himself from injury. The arguments which he has adduced seem deserving of every consideration."

He then proceeds to discuss them, and his conclusion is thus expressed—

"It is evident, therefore, that in this chief we have one who is ready to meet us; and from what is passing in Central Asia at this moment, it is anything but desirable to exhibit indifference to the solicitations of one whose position makes him courted, and whom aid may render powerful for or against us."

One other passage from this part of the despatch, he (Mr. Dunlop) would also give as showing Sir Alexander's opinion of the scheme afterwards adopted by the Governor General of restoring Shah Soojah—

"Under such circumstances, it might be urged that all interference had better be avoided; but this, as it appears to me, would be, under the existing state of things, a very doubtful line of policy, unless it is intended to put forth the ex-King at Loodiana, secure through him a footing in these countries, and sweep the present rulers from their authority, which has happily never been contemplated."

Now, in addition to the alterations already adverted to, all this latter part of the despatch giving Sir Alexander's own opinion

on the Dost's views was also left out. By this most dishonest suppression of paragraphs and parts of paragraphs, the despatch, as originally printed in 1839, was made to bear all the appearance of expressing Sir Alexander Burnes's own sentiments, while in truth he was only urging on the Dost the views of the Government; thus imputing to Sir Alexander Burnes the very sentiments which he sincerely repudiated. Even after thus throwing cold water on all the expectations held out to him by Sir Alexander, the Dost still clung to the hope that the views of the Governor General might be changed; and in February, 1838, Sir Alexander wrote a letter to Sir William Macnaghten, proving that there was even yet no reluctance on the part of the Dost to get rid of the Russian emissary. The Dost submitted to Sir Alexander the draft of the answer he intended to give to the Russian letter, and Sir Alexander, desirous of keeping things open, requested him to leave out certain passages, and the letter was so modified by the Dost. The account of this is of course suppressed. All this was done while Russia was holding out the strongest assurances of support to the Dost, and while we were entirely holding back. Finally, the Governor General adhered to his policy and Sir Alexander Burnes withdrew. As the Dost truly said in one of his letters on this occasion, "I have not abandoned the British, the British have abandoned me." Sir Alexander was obliged to deliver the Governor General's letter, and come away, and the Dost resumed relations with the Russian emissary. On his journey to Lahore Sir Alexander Burnes ascertained that, had the Governor General submitted to Runjeet Singh the proposal by the Dost as to Peshawur he would in all probability have accepted it, but Sir Alexander Burnes's despatch to that effect was suppressed. He (Mr. Dunlop) had no intention of discussing the relative merits of the two courses of policy then opposed to each other, but it was only an act of justice to Sir Alexander Burnes to give the opinion of Mr. Kaye, the historian of the war, who observes—

"Had the British Government endeavoured to effect an amicable arrangement between the Ameer and the Maharajah, there is no room to doubt that Dost Mahommed would have rejected all overtures from the Westward, and proved to us a firm and faithful ally. But instead of this we offered him nothing but our sympathy; and Dost Mahommed, with all respect for the British Government, looked for something more substantial than mere meaningless words."

* * * * *

"It was, however, decreed that Dost Mahommed was a hostile chief, and the policy of the British Government soon made him one. Had Burnes been left to obey the dictates of his own reason and to use the light of his own experience, he would have conciliated both the Candahar Sirdars and the Cabul Ameer, and raised up an effective bulwark against Persian invasion and Russian intrigue. We refused to detach Kohun Dil Khan from the Persian alliance, and we deliberately drove Dost Mahommed Khan into it. In fact, our policy at this time seems to have been directed to the creation of those very difficulties, to encounter which the British Government launched into the Affghan War."

There were numerous other mutilations in the papers, but he would not specially notice them—their main object being to prevent the discovery of the mode in which other documents had been dealt with; but there was one letter to which he should advert, and should advert with sorrow, dated June 2, 1838, and which, though not marked as omitted from the papers of 1839, was, in point of fact, not published among them. Sir Alexander Burnes, in his despatches, had testified not only to the impolicy, but to the injustice of the course which had been pursued. Would that he had never in any degree descended from that high position! But he was in a subordinate position, and was naturally reluctant to throw himself out of his employment, by refusing to co-operate in the course of policy now decided on, and giving offence to his superiors. It would have been better for him had he made the sacrifice. He would have escaped the cruel death which that employment brought on him, and would have made it impossible for those superiors to attempt to falsify the opinions of one who had publicly proclaimed them by declining even to act in the carrying out of a policy he so entirely condemned. Unhappily he did not take that course, and when it was finally decided that the Dost must be deposed, he, in this despatch of June 2, pointed out what he considered the best way of accomplishing that object. Even in that letter, however, he suggested that the question might yet be reconsidered. He observed—

"But it remains to be reconsidered why we cannot act with Dost Mahomed. He is a man of undoubted ability, and has at heart high opinions of the British nation; and if half you must do for others were done for him, and offers made which he could see conduced to his interests, he would abandon Persia and Russia to-morrow. It may be said that that opportunity has been given to him, but I would rather discuss this in person with you, for I think there is much to be said for him. Government have admitted that at best he had but a choice of difficulties, and it should not

be forgotten that we promised nothing, and Persia and Russia held out a great deal."*

[See NOTE at the end.]

He (Mr. Dunlop) had now submitted the case to the House, and what, therefore, did he ask the House to do? First of all, he asked them to look at the evils which the suppression of evidence and the publication of false documents had done. It had, in the first place, done grievous injustice to the character and memory of Sir Alexander Burnes. That officer was at least a faithful servant and did his duty well, and he was himself the first victim of the Afghan war. His body was hacked in pieces by the Afghans, who looked on him as the representative of the British policy. But his reputation was mangled still more cruelly by those who should have defended it and handed his name down to posterity with honour. He had been falsely held out by the Government which had employed him—and so far as they were concerned would have been sent down to posterity—as the instigator and adviser of that unjust and calamitous war, and this for the dastardly purpose of screening themselves from a condemnation which they were conscious that they deserved, and laying on him the obloquy of a charge of which they knew him to be innocent. Then consider, in the second place, the injustice done to Dost Mahommed. We had ruined his family, made him captive, and deprived him of his throne. Surely that might have been enough; but, not content with that, we published false despatches which made it appear that he was faithless to us, and deserved all the injuries which he had sustained. At a subsequent period the Dost recovered his dominions, and when our Empire in India was tottering, he might have avenged himself by merely gathering troops in Cabul, and so creating an alarm which would have prevented Sir John Lawrence from sending reinforcements to Delhi, and thus have imposed upon us the task of reconquering India. But he abstained from taking such a step, thus contrasting the noble conduct of a Mahomedan chief with the tortuous policy of a so-called Christian State. But those were not the only results of these suppressions. They had discredited throughout the whole world the authority of our State papers. It had been the boast of this country that whatever lies might be palmed off by unscrupulous Governments abroad, in this free country our papers laid before Parliament were truthful, and might be relied

upon. Their character was now destroyed. The author of a German history of the Afghan war, heading one of his chapters, "Sir Alexander Burnes, the Instigator of the War," had assured his readers that his account might be relied on, because he had taken it from the English State documents which had been laid before Parliament. In future editions of his work that author would have to alter entirely his narrative, and to confess that those papers were as worthless as if they had been prepared by the most frequently perjured despot of the Continent. Was it possible for the country ever to put faith in State papers again? He confessed his confidence in them had been utterly shaken since the discovery of this affair, and he did not know that he could ever again trust the papers that were laid on the table of that House. But besides, a grievous insult and dishonour had been done to the Sovereign. Such papers are laid upon the table "by Her Majesty's command." Her name was appealed to as the stamp of their truthfulness and authenticity, and yet her own servants had not shrunk from using that name as the voucher and cover of a lie. They had also committed a fraud upon Parliament. Ministers were responsible to Parliament, from which they asked a judgment upon their conduct; but, instead of laying before that House the real and genuine documents on which its judgments was founded, they had abstracted from those statements of most material facts on which it was to be based; they had so mutilated them as to present the very opposite of what they really were, and by that means had sought to avoid the censure they might otherwise have incurred. If a criminal tried at the Old Bailey were to tender forged documents in his defence, he would be guilty only of a moral crime. He owes no allegiance to the Court. But the Ministers of this country owed an allegiance to Parliament which bound them by constitutional obligations to lay on the table none but honest and correct versions of the papers by which their own conduct was to be judged; so that in their case there was not only a moral but a political crime. Again, these proceedings had seriously shaken the confidence of the country in public men—a very grievous evil, because that confidence above every other thing enabled Government to work successfully and harmoniously. Under these circumstances he asked for a Committee to investigate this

matter. It was due to the memory of Sir Alexander Burnes that this should take place, and that if necessary the wrong done to that officer should be authoritatively acknowledged and redressed by the Report of a Committee of that House. It was due likewise to Dost Mahommed, not only in justice, but now also in gratitude, that a like redress should be given to him. It was right also that the conduct of those parties who were the occasion and instruments of this wrong-doing, should be exposed, in order that others might be deterred from the commission of a like offence. He did not wish to make the inquiry with any idea of punishment, because after so great a lapse of time there would be no sympathy with such a proceeding. If, however, the House of Commons shrank from exposing the circumstances to which his Motion referred, it would make itself a participator in the wrong that had been done; and would acquiesce in the deception that had been practised upon itself; while, by screening those who had committed it from even exposure, an encouragement would be held out to its repetition. The Committee might also advantageously consider whether any and what precautions should be taken hereafter to secure that documents placed before Parliament were fair, accurate, and genuine. That would, no doubt, be a delicate task. He had himself no suggestion to make on this point; nor did he so far anticipate the results of an inquiry as to say that it was necessary that any precaution should be taken at all. All he asked was that a careful inquiry should be instituted as the only means by which the confidence of the public could be restored. It might be said that if any check such as that adopted in the American Senate were established in this country, the deception would reappear in another shape, because our agents abroad would write mere formal despatches with nothing in them, and then send private despatches of a totally different purport. That might to a certain extent be true, and the Committee would have to consider whether such a risk ought to be encountered, or whether some better mode of securing the authenticity of the State papers submitted to Parliament could not be devised. However that might be, he was sure that if the House refused to inquire into the subject at all they would only be courting the repetition of these transactions, and exposing themselves to

the same want of confidence which at present attached to those who had been implicated in them. The hon. Gentleman concluded by moving—

“That a Select Committee be appointed, to consider the ‘Correspondence relating to Affghanistan,’ as presented to this House in 1839, and the same Correspondence as presented in 1858, and printed by special order of the House in 1859, and to report on the discrepancies between the two; and also to inquire into the circumstances of the preparation of that Correspondence for being presented on the former of these occasions; and to report their opinion whether any, and, if any, what, precautions should be taken to secure that Documents presented to this House by the Government as Copies or Extracts of Correspondence or other Papers shall give a true representation of the contents of such Correspondence or Papers.”

SIR HENRY WILLOUGHBY seconded the Motion,

[NOTE.]

The following justification by Sir Alexander Burnes himself of the course adopted by him, as exhibited in this letter, appeared in the *Times* after the debate, having been communicated by his brother in a letter dated March 21, 1861:—

“November 6, 1831.

“The exposition of the Governor General’s views in the Parliamentary papers is pure trickery, and I have said so in every company since I have read them; I, however, acquit Lord Auckland of the fraud, and I am sometimes charitable enough to acquit the other authorities, and to believe that they had not read ere they printed. All my implorations to Government to act with promptitude and decision had reference to doing something when Dost Mahommed was King, and all this they have made to appear in support of Shah Soojah being set up. But, again, I did advocate the setting up of Shah Soojah, and lent all my aid, name, and knowledge to do it; but when was this? When my advice had been rejected and the Government were fairly stranded. I first gave opinions, and then asked leave to withdraw; but Lord Auckland proved to me that it would be desertion at a critical moment, and I saw so myself; but I entered upon the support of his policy, not as what was best, but what was best under the circumstances which a series of blunders had produced. To have acted otherwise must have been to make myself superior to the Governor General, and I saw that I had a duty to my country, ill as the representative of that country in India had behaved to me, and I bore and forbore in consequence. My life has been devoted to my country. Like creeping things I may have in the outset looked only to personal advantages, but persons have long since given place to things. I now feel myself at the age of thirty-five with an onerous load upon me—the holy and sacred interests of nations; and, much as men may envy me, I begin sometimes to tremble at the giddy eminence I have already attained. In some respects it is, indeed, not to be envied, and I only hope that no passion may turn me from the path I tread, and that I may feel the awful responsibility which I have brought upon myself.”

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